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'Static Shock!' recharges comics line - Oklahoman, The (Oklahoma City, OK) - April 6, 2001 - page 11-B
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If you think Saturday mornings are limited to Pokemon, Digimon and other Japanese imports, you're in for a shock.

"Static Shock," based on the Milestone Comics character co-created by Dwayne McDuffie, is the fourth-rated cartoon on Saturday mornings among the 2-11 age block, and the show routinely wins its time slot.

Static is Virgil Hawkins, an intelligent, fun-loving black teen-ager who acquires electric powers. Influenced by the comics he's read, he becomes a costumed hero.

McDuffie was influenced by the original Spider-Man, which also dealt with a teen adapting to strange powers.

Milestone ended its monthly line in 1997, but graphic novels featuring the characters are available. "Static," along with fellow Milestone titles "Icon" and "Hardware," rank among the longest-running comic books starring black characters.

Milestone's characters took a few trips around Hollywood before finding a fit with Static. At one point, McDuffie said, a pilot was optioned in which producers tried to make the Milestone "look as much like the X-Men as possible."

Another pitch involved Icon, Milestone's super-powered, 8,000-year-old alien who on Earth is Augustus Freeman, a conservative black lawyer.

Alan Burnett, now the producer of "Batman Beyond," wrote a script for an Icon movie. While that particular project didn't happen, it cemented a relationship between Milestone and Burnett, who would continue to pitch Milestone properties.

Static came about during another pitch for Icon, this time for an animated series.

"They had comic books around the room for the network executives," McDuffie said, "and they're looking at them, and they're like, 'Can Icon be 15 years old?... They've decided that kids only like to see kids.... I said, 'No, Icon can't be 15, because he's 8,000 years old.' And they said, 'Can he be an 8,000-year-old 15-year-old?'

"I slumped my head into my hands," McDuffie said.

Then the executives' interest was sparked by Static.

"They're like, 'Oh, there's this kid on a garbage can, can we do him?' And because Alan is really good at doing TV, he's talking about Icon, and in the middle of the sentence, all of a sudden, the entire pitch became a pitch about Static."

Even after Static had been decided upon, there were a few bumps along the way.

"They actually made him a year younger, because 15's too old, he's now 14." McDuffie said.

"At one point they wanted to do a live-action and cast the kid from 'Home Improvement,'" McDuffie said. "and there was another pitch where he was going to be adopted by a white family."

But the "Static Shock!" on the air is remarkably similar to the comic.

"They changed his costume, which initially I hated, but now I like," McDuffie said.

Other denizens of the Milestone Universe will return in time. Many have guest-starred on "Static Shock!," which McDuffie said he hopes will lead to a resurgence for those characters. "Static Shock!" airs at 10 a.m.

Saturdays on KOCB-34.

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